

Before the FCC decided to pursue Net Neutrality protections, Fox News Channel's Glenn Beck warned his audience that the government was "trying to take over the media." Beck later said that Net Neutrality would "wildly affect your life and free speech" by forcing a "Marxist utopia" on the Internet.

### Development of Pseudo-dangers and the Evolutionary Use of the World Wide Web

As civilizations have matured, the knowledge of dangers has increased dramatically; so dramatically, in fact, that these dangers have outpaced the capacity for one person to verify and assimilate them all. This awareness of incalculable, imminent dangers creates the opportunity for power structures to manipulate the scope or severity of a danger to produce mass hysteria for a preferred result. Throughout the history of civilizations, different power structures have successfully used a litany of techniques to continue the use of these "pseudo-dangers" as the development of globalization produces more and more independent media outlets to debunk them. The newest of these, independent outlets through the Internet, have revolutionized the struggle.

Pseudo-dangers have been part of civilizations all over the world and are still prevalent today. James Jasper, a Professor of Sociology at CUNY, recalls pseudo-dangers dating back to 1768 China. The time was marked by a period of soul stealing, when people believed the soul resided in a ponytail. Ponytails were cut off, and after spellwork, could be used to do a number of things, including to help engineers work on building bridges. Across the country, people used soul-stealing to bring neighbors forward and accuse them. People would provide witness for both sides that the other was soul-stealing, and yet, inevitably, all would confess after torture. This pseudo-danger took residence over fears of the current Manchu rulers, where a ponytail was "a sign of allegiance" (Jasper 1).

Historical examples like the hysteria over Jews and other scapegoats during Nazi rule provide insight into the motives for such hysteria. "Background Notes on Countries of the World 2003" cites low employment as a factor, as well as, fears of Communism (Background Notes 4). The Nazi Party found a cause for these stresses in "Jewish and non-German ethnic groups" (Background Notes 4).

Recently the US news media brought in a story about a "flesh-eating bacteria" that depicted a gruesome outcome and its rapidly spreading contamination (Glassner 7). This infection, a strain of strep correctly called necrotizing fasciitis, produced only 12 deaths in Britain the previous year, and produced only 500 to 1,500 cases in the US out of the "20 to 30 million strep infections each year" (Glassner 8). Despite this evidence, the news stories continued to follow cases for years (Glassner 8).

There are contemporary uses of pseudo-dangers being perpetuated outside the US as well. Deborah Scroggins wrote an article in 2005 called "The Dutch-Muslim Culture War" in which she goes into detail the different aspects of a developing mass hysteria in Europe of Islam. Theo Van

Gogh, a Dutchman, was famously assassinated on his way to work by an Islamic fundamentalist living in Holland, an event “sparking dozens of attacks on mosques and schools” (Scroggins, 21). Scroggins notes that, “Since the murder, a surprising number of native-born Dutch intellectuals have come around to the Muslim point of view” which is that there are several media figures who are pushing the pseudo-fear of Muslims (Scroggins 21).

In examining these examples of pseudo-dangers there has been a close relationship between the success of the pseudo-dangers and a lack of independent media. Reliable yet not mainstream individuals have explored this connection.

Laura Spinney is a journalist for New Scientist. In her article “Terror’s Hidden Ally” she investigates cases of mass hysteria. She concludes that in a more permanent mass hysteria, “For an episode to become chronic it has to be believable by those affected, and it has to be reinforced, at least at the start, by local experts, including physicians and the media” (quoted Spinney 2).

In these examples there has also been a history of power structures swallowing up independent media. Noam Chomsky, noted linguist and professor emeritus at MIT, lays out the trend of consolidation in his work *Manufacturing Consent*. In 1983, he notes, there were 50 major corporations in the media industry, and by 1990 it was down to 23 (Chomsky iii). Now there are just 9 major corporations that control the majority, if not all, of media sources in the US (Chomsky iii).

Ted Turner, the owner and developer of CNN, gives an insider’s glance at the recent assimilation of the television media market into oligopolies his article “Roll Back Consolidation”. In an overview, he states: “In the media, as in any industry, big corporations play a vital role, but so do small, emerging ones. When you lose small businesses, you lose big ideas. People who own their own businesses are independent thinkers. They know they can’t compete by imitating the big guys- they have to innovate, so they’re less obsessed with earnings than with ideas” (Turner 1). Turner goes on to say that with the structure of free markets being changed the media market consists of only oligopolies, which are large companies that are profit driven (Turner 1). They do this, he says, even when it contradicts “local interests and community values” (Turner 1).

The Internet is the newest medium of media. Barbara Schloman is an Associate Dean for Library Public Services Libraries & Media Services at Kent State University, who asks in the title of her article “Is it Time to Visit the Blogosphere?” She talks about how blogs are one of many ways of communicating in the Internet, and can be used by a diverse field from political bloggers to medical professionals to “serve their particular communication needs” (Schloman 1). Schloman lists the array of independent media resources available on the Internet, and concludes that a blog, adding to the independent media within the Internet, is the right move for many institutions like education and

health care (Scholoman 5).

Exploring the state of the power-structures, media's role in past pseudo-dangers, as well as techniques used by power-structures to maintain them, could provide insight into how pseudo-dangers would be created in the Internet which is a relatively new form for information and news.

Laura Spinney, the journalist for New Scientist who in her article "Terror's Hidden Ally" investigates experts in different cases of mass hysteria, tries to learn more about the cause and solutions to these terrors. She first finds that mass hysteria dates back to the Middle Ages (Spinney 2). Psychiatrist Simon Wessely at King's College London says, "its causes tend to reflect a society's beliefs. In the past, witchcraft was often blamed" and in some societies it still is "but in the industrialized world, environmental contamination is more often seen as the culprit" (qtd. in Spinney 2). Wessely has come to classify mass hysteria into two groups. One group is the more temporary kind that occurs frequently but then disappears after the truth is revealed (Spinney 2). The second group Wessely describes as happening when there's a lack of understanding with the government and the hysteria happens over and over, reshaping itself with the next event (Spinney 2).

John O'Loughlin and Colin Flint from the Department of Geography at the University of Colorado and Luc Anselin from the National Center for Geographic Information and Analysis at the University of California, Santa Barbara compiled extensive background information of 1930 German voting records in a paper titled "The Geography of the Nazi Vote: Context, Confession, and Class in the Reichstag Election of 1930". It contains vital information on cohorts that could explain Germany's sudden investment in such a propagandized leader. In it, O'Loughlin describes the many prevailing theories such as the class theory that "maintains that each social stratum formulates its own democratic and extremist forms of political expression" (O'Loughlin 353). This phenomena occurs when "economic concentration and centralization, as small family-owned shops, for example, became uncompetitive with the appearance of large department stores" (O'Loughlin 353). Another theory speculated by O'Loughlin is the theory of mass society, which O'Loughlin defines as, "the key variables for explaining the NSDAP vote are the proportions of young voters, previous non-voters, and the unemployed, along with the size of settlement" (O'Loughlin 353). The final theory introduced, O'Loughlin tells us, "is based on economic self-interest." Brustein (1990; 1993) regards NSDAP supporters as "rational fascists who assess their material situation against perceived benefits obtained by voting for and joining the NSDAP. From the vantage point of voting as self-interested, the key variables are not class-based but consist of indicators of stress on the local economic base, namely debt, unemployment, farm size, agricultural specialty (livestock and dairy or grain), heavy industry, and export industries" (qtd. in O'Loughlin 353). According to O'Loughlin, Germany was a culturally diverse nation and by focusing their propaganda to areas

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larity (Oâ€™Loughlin 354). Oâ€™Loughlin gives us an example where, â€œIn regions with a history of anti-Semitism, like Middle Franconia, and parts of Hesse and Westphalia-Rhineland, the NSDAP emphasized the myth of the Jewish threat to German economic sovereignty, while in urban areas like Berlin and Hamburg they stressed an anti-capitalist message (Kershaw 1983; Stachura 1980)â€ (Oâ€™Loughlin 354). They flatly mention that there was economic turmoil as well: â€œIn late 1929, the economy entered a downward spiral as industrial production began to decline, dropping by 31 percent from June 1928 to May 1930, and unemployment rose by over 3 million, an increase of more than 200 percent, between 1928 and the beginning of 1930 (Childers 1938:131)â€ (Oâ€™Loughlin 356). All said, this economic turmoil effected the desirable message in the media- from one of truth to one of scapegoating and hope.

As for Islamophobia in Europe, Scroggins interviews Karima Belhaj who runs the largest womenâ€™s shelter in Amsterdam and helped form the â€œStop the Witchhunt!â€ campaign to combat the new pseudo-danger of Islam. According to Scroggins at the time of the interview, â€œArsonists had set fire for the second time to an Islamic school in the town of Uden. A few days later a regional police unit warned the rise of right-win Dutch youth gangs potentially presents a more dangerous threat to the country than Islamist terrorismâ€ (Scroggins 23). Belhaj claims, â€œThe rise of Islamism is not the problem. The problem is that hatred against Arabs and Muslims is show in this country without shameâ€ (qtd. in Scroggins 23). Scroggins finds such resentment in Storhaug, who runs a civil rights group but still says, â€œI think she (Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a prominent anti-Islam supporter) is doing a great service to democracy and the future, because Islamism is the biggest threat to de!

mocracy and to Europeâ€ (quoted in Scroggins 25).

Martin Walker, in an article in 2006 called â€œEuropeâ€™s Mosque Hysteriaâ€ tries to debunk some myths about Islam in Europe but at the same time highlights and uses fears of his own. He notes the success of the fear of Islam in books by showcasing Orina Fallaci. According to Walker she, â€œhas sold more than a million copies of her 2004 book *The Force of Reason*, in which she passionately argues that, â€œEurope is no longer Europe, it is â€œEurabia,â€ a colony of Islam, where the Islamic invasion does not proceed only in a physical sense but also in a mental and cultural senseâ€ (Walker 1). She continues, â€œServility to the invaders has poisoned democracy, with obvious consequences for the freedom of thought and for the concept itself of libertyâ€ (Walker 1). Walker then goes on to showcase an example in newspapers with Danielf Pipes, a reporter for the New York Sun who said, â€œgrand cathedrals will appear as vestiges of a prior civilizationâ€”at least until a !

Saudi-style regime transforms them into mosques or a Taliban-like regime blows them upâ€ (quoted

in Walker 1). Near the end of the article Walker breeds hysteria by writing, "Across Europe, there are significant numbers of potential terrorist cells, radical Islamist activists and organizations, and mosques and imams that cleave to an extreme and puritanical form of Islam" (Walker 9).

In an editorial in *The Economist* titled, "In Europe's Midst", there appears to be a plethora of fears from Islamic communities. It starts off solemnly: "Whether from such a network or from local groups, the threat of jihadism is being felt throughout Europe" (*Economist* 1). It even begins to take the offensive by stating, "For everyone's sake, therefore, Europeans need to stiffen their campaign against indigenous jihad. And that means concentrating on three things: the jihadis, the law and—most controversially—Islam itself" (*Economist* 2). Strangely enough, they even reveal the scale of their previous words when they mention, "For every one of these footsoldiers of terror, tens of thousands of similar young men choose to lead uneventful and peaceful lives" (*Economist* 2). But the hysteria continues as if that wasn't even a pause, going on to say, "It would be even better if they (Islam mosques) could now lead public marches against the men of

violence and, within their communities, a public debate against jihadism" (*Economist* 3). The self-righteous undertone can be heard in the final words of the article: "For what is needed is a free and open debate within Islam one in which the modernizers emulate the tactics of the extremists in a crucial way: that they exploit Europe's free flow of ideas in order to win the argument against those keener on medieval practices and violence" (*Economist* 3).

There appears to be a clear connection between the relationship between a power-structure's control over the media and the increase in pseudo-dangers; that with independent media such as Ted Turner's CNN\* and Noam Chomsky breaking up oligopolies such as "The Economist" and major publishers (that are looking to sell as much as they can based on the fears and hysteria of the mass) comes a solution to debunk pseudo-dangers. With all these past experiences, it is critical to see how history may affect the Internet in order to explore it as a potential independent medium.

In a society that is increasingly losing its sense of community, where fewer and fewer community meetings are organized and attended in churches or civic centers, people's assessment on public policy rely more and more on the news they watch. American media consumers and the industry have a right to know that their news is filled with pseudo-dangers. With ninety-nine percent of US households having a TV, pseudo-dangers have a chance to influence all of us. As US society moves to using the Internet as a news source, the potential for power-structured influence is already being tapped.

While the battle of corporate influence over the Internet has begun, it is unlikely that any power structure will perform a successful coup for control. This does not mean that there aren't serious moves being made by several power structures with a hard fought battle on both sides.

The first conflict is waged within the masses. Although to most intellectuals pseudo-dangers and mass hysteria are accepted phenomena, any attempts to suggest these occurrences in today's

society are met with harsh criticism. This is because in any power structure there are "agents" who willingly or unknowingly reinforce the doctrine in all elements of